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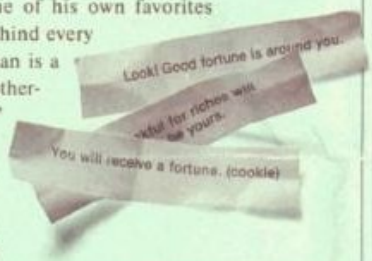
THE MERIT Attitude
NEWS FROM MERIT

FORTUNE *continued from page one*

He immigrated to America with his parents at age seven in 1956. Later, he attended Columbia University and earned a degree in electrical engineering and an MBA. After working as an engineer, he became restless and changed careers.

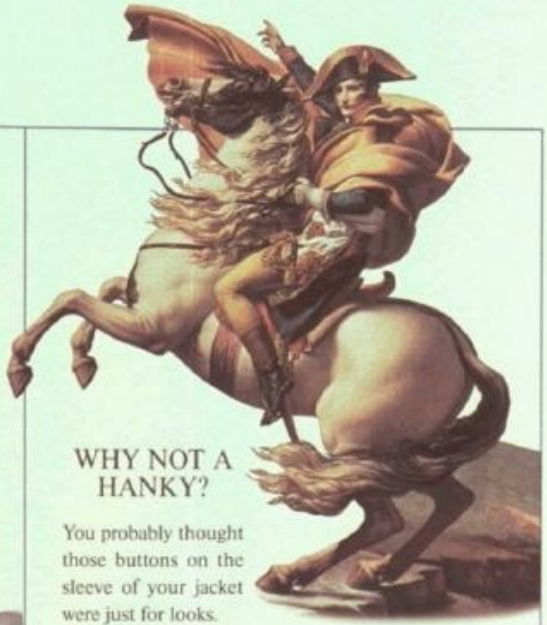
Joining the Bank of America, he was put in charge of major accounts in the Pacific Northwest and was later transferred to Hong Kong and then the Philippines. He soon opted for yet another career change, joining a group of investors in importing food and other products from the People's Republic of China. Five years later, Lau and his partners bought Won Ton Food, Inc., the largest fortune cookie producer in America.

The fortunes soon reflected Lau's wry sense of humor. Some of his own favorites include: "Behind every successful man is a surprised mother-in-law," "Beware of ambition, it can lead you to a lot of work," and "There's no place like home, except perhaps Hawaii."



How does he keep coming up with 1,800 new fortunes each year? He takes inspiration from wherever he can. His favorite sources are friends, Confucius, and the 5,000 year old *I Ching*, the ancient Chinese guide to fortune telling. Lau's own copy of the *I Ching* is dog-eared from constant use. He likes to read through this mystical work, picking out passages that strike him as good prospects for condensation into cookie-sized sayings. He then enters the data into his desktop computer and prints out new sayings as he needs them.

Even an old pro like Lau admits that it's tough to keep up with America's huge appetite for fortune cookie fortunes. He welcomes suggestions. If you think you have a great fortune in you, send it to: Donald Lau, Won Ton Food, Inc., 200 Moore Street, Brooklyn, NY 11206. Who knows? The next fortune you read could be your own.



WHY NOT A HANKY?

You probably thought those buttons on the sleeve of your jacket were just for looks.

Think again. The year was 1812 and Napoleon was preparing to invade Russia. As every high school history book can tell you, he decided to do it in winter, the height of cold and flu season. But there's something your textbook probably didn't tell you. The spit-and-polish general hated the sloppy habits of his army. So he instructed the military tailors to add metal buttons to the sleeves of his soldiers' jackets.

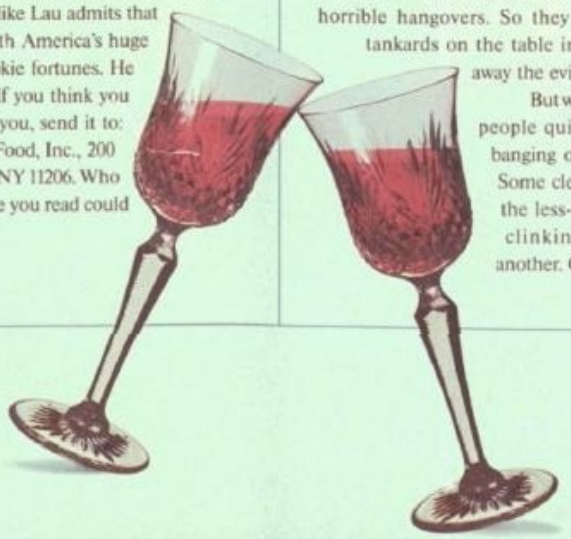
Have you ever tried to wipe your nose on ice-cold buttons?

A REAL CLINKER

When's the last time you toasted someone by clinking glasses? Like many thoroughly modern customs, this one has ancient origins.

Centuries ago, spirits were really rough stuff, and the morning after was even rougher. Our ancestors believed demons in the brew caused their horrible hangovers. So they banged their pewter tankards on the table in an effort to frighten away the evil spirits.

But when glass came into use, people quickly realized that the banging on the bar had to stop. Some clever soul came up with the less-than-smashing idea of clinking one glass against another. Cheers.



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